

**Walking – exploratory  
research for  
communications  
development**

**08229**

April 2009

## Confidentiality

Please note that the copyright in the attached report is owned by TfL and the provision of information under Freedom of Information Act does not give the recipient a right to re-use the information in a way that would infringe copyright (for example, by publishing and issuing copies to the public).

Brief extracts of the material may be reproduced under the fair dealing provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 for the purposes of research for non-commercial purposes, private study, criticism, review and news reporting.

Details of the arrangements for reusing the material owned by TfL for any other purpose can be obtained by contacting us at [enquire@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:enquire@tfl.gov.uk)

Research conducted by 2CV

# Contents



**Getting closer**

**Benefits and barriers to walking**

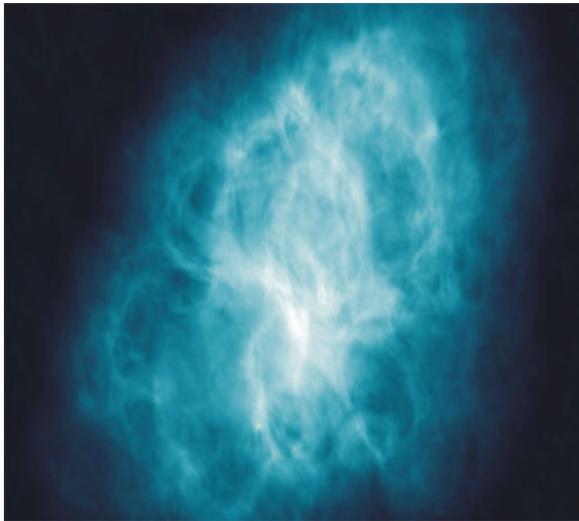
**Going deeper into the barriers**

**What can we learn from a wider exploration?**

**Summing up and taking it forward**

**Some thought starters**

# Background



- There have already been a number of studies which examined people's reasons for not walking more often for transport purposes
- This remit of this research is to explore the whole subject of walking and provide a rich, textural understanding of barriers and attitudes
- In order to get beyond rational reported behaviour this research has been designed to delve deeper and examine historical, cultural and psychological reasons why people are reluctant to walk

# Objectives – going deeper

## ***Business objective***

- To understand what is holding people back from making short walkable utility journeys (under 2km) on foot – in order to deliver a more effective tactical, branded communications campaign which will trigger behaviour change.

## ***Research objectives overview***

- To explore and understand the myriad of different reasons people do not walk more for transport reasons
- To build a sense of hierarchy from these reasons – understanding which are most salient and robust for people
- To dig deeper to understand any latent psychological reasons for not walking e.g. references to childhood, using the tipping point as a place to avoid decision making, etc.
- To dig deeper into the cultural/discursive meanings and associations which may influence people's perceptions of walking as a travel option
- To understand the micro dynamics and details of the actual physical, emotional, tonal experience of walking for those who choose not to do it

# A less conventional research approach

Walking and talking to 'Walkers' and 'Non walkers'



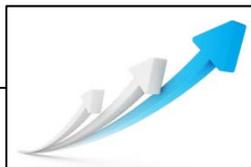
- Understanding their lives and feelings towards walking: 10 x Ethnographic interviews and walks plus 20 x Imagery Scrapbooks

Going deeper



- Using expert opinion and cultural discourse to get beyond reported behaviours

What can we learn and take forward



These findings represent a fusion of the learnings from talking to people, from the expert interview with a psychologist and from a detailed \*semiotic and cultural analysis on the subject of walking.

\*This report is provided separately

## Who we spoke to

Ethnographies	Age	Status	SEG	Location	Gender	Life-stage	Main modes used
1 Stephanie	18-20	Non	ABC1	Outer (N)	Female	Pre Family	Car Tube
2 Salim	21-23	Non	C2DE	Inner (S)	Male	Pre Family	Car
3 Matt	23-25	Non	ABC1	Inner (E)	Male	Pre Family	Bus Tube
4 Natalie	25-27	Non	C2DE	Outer (W)	Female	Pre Family	Car
5 Lucy	28-30	Non	ABC1	Outer (S)	Female	Family	Car
6 Spencer	31-35	Non	C2DE	Inner (N)	Male	Family	Car Motorbike Bicycle
7 Pepe	36-40	Non	ABC1	Inner (W)	Female	Family	Car
8 Neil	40-45	Non	C2DE	Outer (E)	Male	Family	Scooter Car
9 Sam	18-27	Walker	C2DE	Inner (S)	Male	Pre family	Walking Bus Tube
10 Shelly	28-45	Walker	ABC1	Outer (N)	Female	Family	Walking Car

**Non walkers =**

**Non walkers = make short utility journeys on foot once a week or less often**

**Walkers =**

**Walkers = make utility journeys on foot 2-3 times a week or more often**

**Getting closer**

## A broad cross section of Londoners interviewed



- Students
- Working mothers
- Non Working mothers
- Working people/commuters

### Making many different short utility journeys:

- Daily commute
- School run
- Shopping
- Banking/errands
- Gym/sports
- Activities/interests
- Social outings/visits



### Living in many different parts of London

**Inner:** Blackheath, East London, Camberwell, Ladbroke Grove, Fulham

**Outer:** Surrey, Barnet, Whetstone

# Travel pressures differ by lifestages

## Pre family



- Work/college daily commute
- After work/college interests and activities eg. gym
- Active social lives

## Key needs

- Pre family the focus is on the individual so convenience is key driver
- Feel time pressured so want to save precious time to do the things they enjoy

## Family



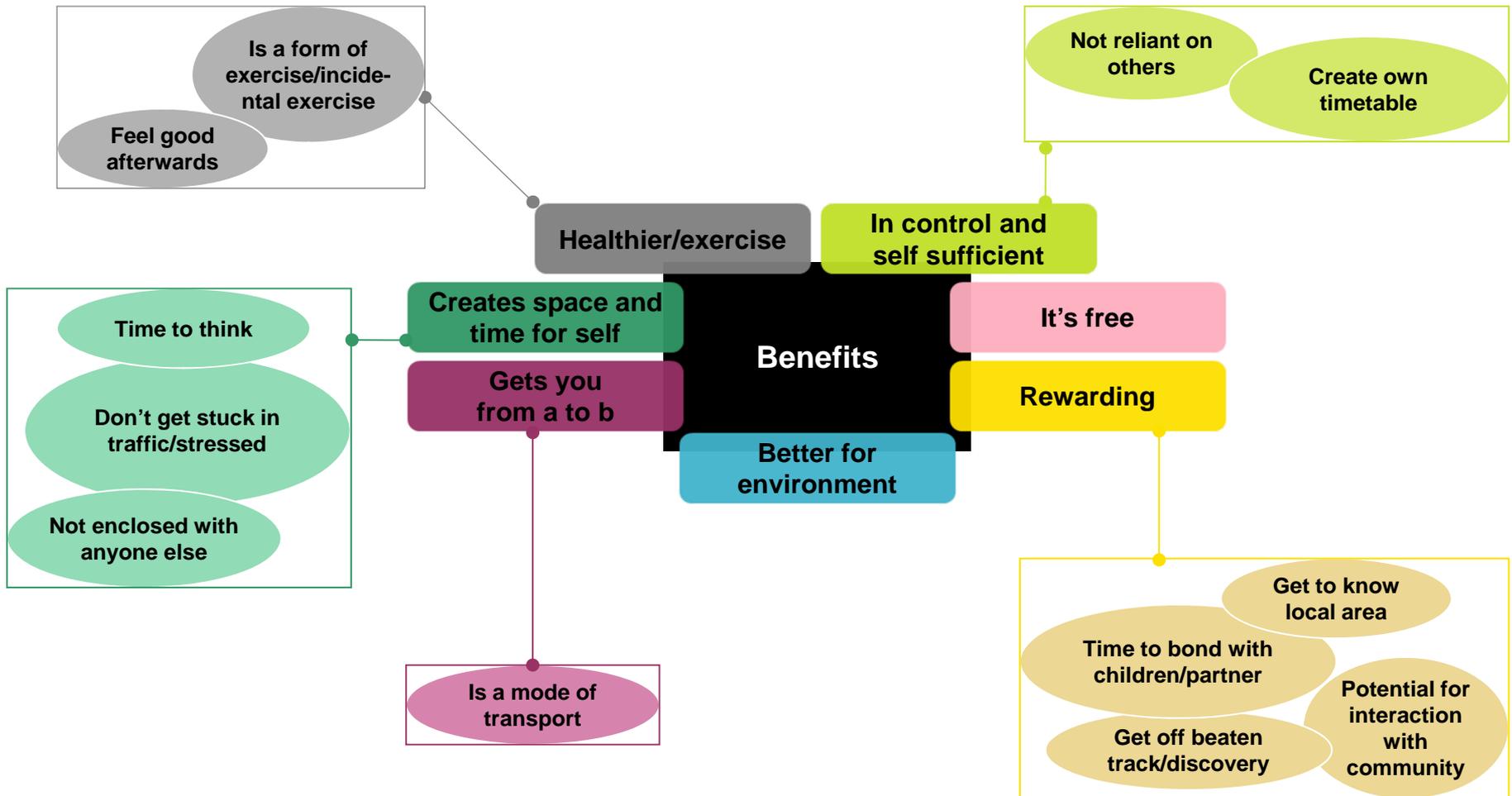
- Work or stay at home
- School/nursery run and/or daily commute
- After school activities
- Weekend kids' sports
- Family activities
- Seeing other families

## Key needs

- Family/children main focus, timetables can be complex
- Focus is on ease of transportation and being on time
- Family leisure time precious

# **Benefits and barriers to walking**

# Benefits cited are surface level unless identified by an actual walker



# And, the benefits of walking are easy to identify by all but reflect a utopian *ideal*

## The ideal condition for walking is:

- Sunshine/good weather
- Nothing to carry
- No deadlines
- Green spaces and trees
- Clean, even pavements, no obstructions
- Little or no traffic
- Feeling safe/a sense of community
- Time to think
- Time to bond with your walking companions



**Even for current walkers this ideal state is not a reflection of daily life in London.  
The above more accurately reflects a leisure walk where time and  
environment can be controlled**

# Walking evokes positive associations with childhood especially if older

## Childhood



- Your only independent mode of transport (along with cycling) – freedom
- Memories of family days out/holidays – walking for discovery
- Playing outside with friends – walking to explore the neighbourhood
- Possibly living in less urban environment

## Now



- Time poor, always in a rush – a function of being an adult but also pace of society
- Walking is what you do to get to another, 'real' mode of transport
- The world seems a more dangerous place both for adults and their children
- More cars on roads – greater pollution and danger



**Obviously there is a nostalgic glow and it's impossible to return to the past but is it possible to leverage more positive associations?**

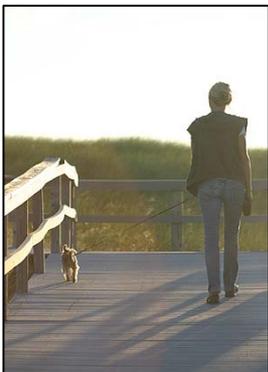
# So what can we learn by talking to 'walkers'?

They have adapted their lifestyle and attitude so that walking becomes an intrinsic part of it



- Build in **time** for it
- View it as a **positive experience** – bonding time with kids, exercise, interacting with the neighbourhood, better than driving in traffic or being crammed on public transport
- View it as an **effective** way of getting from a to b

Or...



- Their **lifestyle and environment** allow or encourage walking.  
Eg.
  - Live in pleasant neighbourhood
  - Don't work
  - Live centrally/close to most amenities

# Their travel diaries reveal that the desire to walk is about shifting your mindset



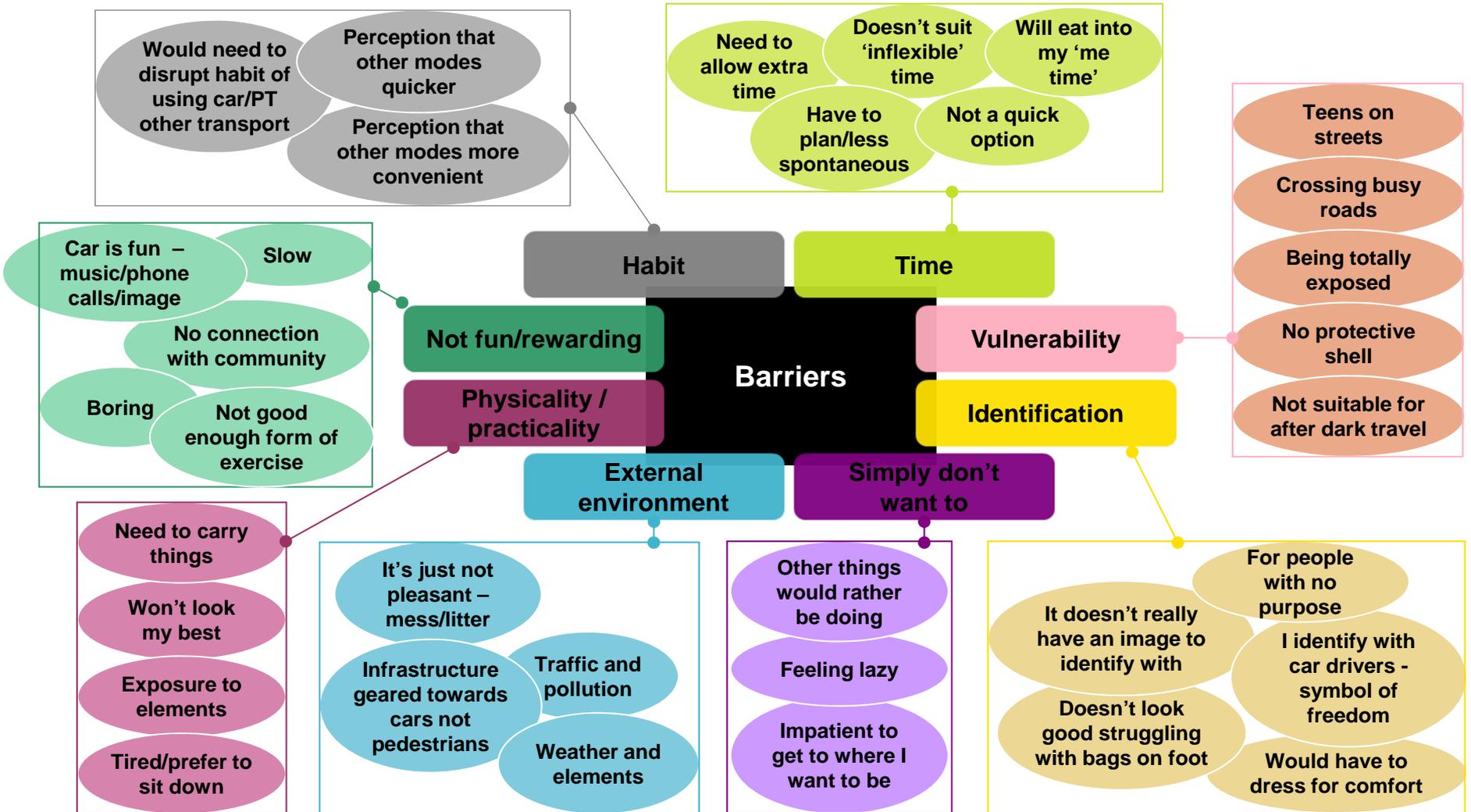
However, the key to unlocking this is the fact we are examining *UTILITY* journeys, however short



- They have a **purpose**
- There are often **time pressures** and constraints
- They often involve **other people** or children
- They can involve **multiple stops/drop offs**
- They may involve **carrying or conveying** things

Walking does not easily address many of these requirements  
For non walkers it is simply not a 'utility' mode  
The utility journey and the ideals of walking are often at odds with each other...

# Barriers to walking are numerous and interrelated



# The travel diaries of non walkers reveal a combination of reality and reluctance.....

My little boy is too young to walk so far when tired

I didn't walk mainly because I didn't have time

It was cold outside and it's a long road

It's too far to walk

Couldn't be bothered, it's a boring walk

I didn't walk because it's easier not to

Didn't want to see anyone I know after I'd been to the gym

Drove because of the number of people

It was cold and dark by the time I left

Because I had bags to carry



**Going deeper into the barriers**

## Time



## Time: We are in a time-constrained increasingly fast-paced society

- 'Fashionable' to be stressed
- Being time-poor means you have a purposeful life
- In answer to the question "how are you?" people now answer "pretty busy" rather than talking about their health
- Most feel that their time is a precious commodity which must be 'saved' wherever possible
- It's all about being as efficient as possible – could create time to walk but that isn't being efficient
- The destination is more important than the journey eg. do not want to 'waste' precious exercise time by walking to the gym

**The perception is that walking is the slowest option – therefore the choice is to 'save' time by using other modes**

## Time



## Time is delineated as either controllable, 'flexible' time or uncontrollable, inflexible time

### Inflexible Time

- Weekdays/9 to 5
- Journey to work
- Journey to school/nursery
- Picking up children
- After work/school classes and activities
- Errands within confines of bank/shop/office opening times

### Flexible Time

- Weekends/holidays
- The non working (parents)
- Socialising/visiting
- Gym (not classes)
- Going shopping

**Flexible time is rarer than inflexible time and is more about leisure than daily routine**

# Time

**“If you’re pushed for time,  
you’ve got to use transport”**

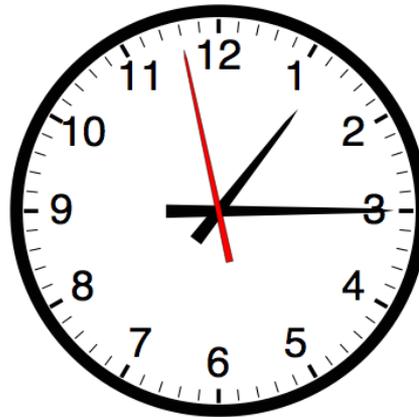
Male, C2DE, Family

**“If I had more time, I would go  
for walks. But at the moment I  
just don’t have the time”**

Female, C2DE, Pre-Family

**“When you’re a mum, it feels  
like you never have the time to  
do things you would like  
to...it’s easier to drive than  
walk.”**

Female, ABC1, Family



**“It would just take too long  
for me to walk to college.”**

Female, ABC1, Pre-Family

## Vulnerability



# Vulnerability: Feeling vulnerable is highly subjective but results in the same desire for 'protection'

- Cars and having to cross busy roads
- Other people on the streets – especially if in gangs
- Walking after dark/late at night
- The physical environment can seem threatening – graffiti, litter, dog mess, abandoned junk etc
- And most of all the complete exposure when travelling: no protective shell, no motorised means of escape

### This is endorsed by our psychologist:

- The car is the ultimate protective cocoon when leaving the house i.e. you recreate your own world in there with your music and ambience and are protected from the outside world while travelling
- Even on public transport there is still the feeling of a protective shell and your private space which you create with headphones MP3 players and newspapers
- People on foot also try to create this protective environment via headphones but they are exposed in terms of the absence of a protective shell
- Vulnerability can be heightened by formative childhood experiences eg if the first steps away from mother were traumatic
- Can also feel temporarily vulnerable as an adult eg difficulties at home can make one feel extra vulnerable when leaving the home

**Vulnerability may be a less conscious barrier but can help explain why people may be reluctant to travel without a 'shell'**

# Vulnerability

**“It’s not a particularly safe place around here, and in that respect you shouldn’t really be walking on your own”**

**Male, ABC1, Pre-family, Inner London**

**“Where I used to live it was a lot worse, with gangs of young people just hanging out – you didn’t feel very safe.”**

**Female, C2DE, Family**

**“When I’m walking with my family near a busy main road I’m concerned for their safety. I feel threatened by traffic”**

**Male, C2DE, Family**

**“I’m not so bothered about it, but my parents don’t like the idea of me walking on my own at night”**

**Female, ABC1, Pre-Family**

# Physicality/practicality and External environment: rational barriers can be just as powerful as emotional ones

## Physicality / practicality



## Times when simply not practical to walk:

- Have too much to carry/convey especially with children
- Have small children: can't walk far/difficult to control on street
- Weather is bad and need to be sheltered
- Multiple destinations/stop offs necessary
- Not wearing suitable footwear/clothing

## External environment



## This should not be underestimated:

- The weather – often used as the first excuse
- Many areas feel pro car and anti pedestrian
- Not pleasant to linger – litter, dog mess
- General feeling of dirt and pollution
- Not aesthetically pleasing environs: commerce and vehicles are the priority
- Obstacles – uneven paving/signs and street furniture/other people!

## Physicality / Practicality

**"I find walking is a good way to combine getting from A to B and getting good exercise as well."**

**-Walker Female, ABC1,**

**"I often go to the gym after work, and it would just be too far to walk home afterward."**

**Female, C2DE, Pre-family**

**"If I walk to work, I feel better when I get there than I would have if I had driven."**

**-  
Female, C2DE, Pre-family**

**"I could walk to Sainsbury's, but it's just too hard with bags and a small child."**

**- Female, ABC1, Family**

# External Environment

**“In the summer I walk in the park with my friends.”**  
- Female, ABC1, Pre-Family

**“It’s not pleasant to walk along streets that are dirty, with uneven pavestones and littered with rubbish.”**  
- Male, C2DE, Family

**“The local area is quite suburban with lots of greenery, which makes walking an enjoyable experience.”**  
- Female, ABC1, Family

**“Everything is motor vehicles against pedestrians. They’re the minority, and it doesn’t make walking pleasant.”**  
- Male, C2DE, Family

Simply don't  
want to



## Simply don't want to walk

- We are in society where instant gratification is the norm and it is no longer considered virtuous to defer gratification – people are impatient as well as being time-poor
- No pressure to do something simply because it's good for you. These days it's not “a sin” to be lazy or sit on the sofa or in front of your PC or get lifts everywhere or jump into the car – technology has made this lifestyle acceptable
- This gets passed onto children and is further reinforced by parents anxiously ferrying them around in cars and instilling the notion that the world is a dangerous place
- For those who feel guilty about not being more active or environmental then the weather and time constraints are thrown up as defence
- It is convenient to hold up lack of time as a defence when just beneath the surface is the desire to sleep in longer.....we make time for the things we really want to do

**When this is the cultural norm it is difficult to swim against the tide**

## Habit



# Habit: related to 'Time' and 'Simply not wanting to walk'

- It is **habitual** to regard motorised or even wheeled forms of transport as 'modes'
- Walking rarely comes into this consideration set
- The perception is that **other modes are quicker** and therefore more time-efficient (even if this is not borne out for shorter journeys where parking or waiting for public transport may be time consuming)
- The habit to opt for other modes of transport is borne out of people's key driver which is **convenience**

Speed and convenience are initially key drivers but then choices turn into habit

# Habit

**“I tend to get in the car because it’s quick and easy. You get into a mindset of ease.”**

**- Male, C2DE, Family**

**“I imagine that I’ll get there quicker by car, even though sometimes I end up being stuck in really bad traffic.”**

**- Female, C2DE, Pre-family**

**“I used to drive everywhere, but since having children I’ve decided to walk because I can engage more with them when I walk”**

**Walker, Female, C2DE, Family**

**“It’s so convenient to drive, that I don’t really think about not driving.”**

**-Female, ABC1, Pre-family**

# Then there are the less tangible barriers

## Identification



## Identification

- Perception from some that walkers are either unemployed, poor or lacking in purpose
- Everyone walks therefore lacks a clear identity
- Not regarded as mode of transport at all
- Don't want to be seen in less than perfect state eg. struggling with shopping, hot and sweaty from gym, in 'sensible' shoes

## Not fun/rewarding



## Not fun/rewarding

- Especially true for those enamoured of car driving eg. new drivers
  - Car is extension of personality
  - Is fast
  - Can play music/create own space
- With breakdown in community little reward in being out on foot eg. no longer the norm to greet/chat to strangers
- Not fun/not good exercise

# Identification

**“When I think of people who walk I think of either little children or old people”**  
- Female, C2DE, Pre-Family

**“When I imagine “pedestrians” I think of loads of commuters in the morning rush hour”**  
-  
Female, ABC1, Family

**“A pedestrian is someone who walks a lot. There’s a variety of images, I couldn’t stereotype.”**

- Male, C2DE, Family

**“A pedestrian is someone with lots of leisure time and who’s in no rush to get anywhere.”**  
- Female, ABC1, Pre-Family

## Not fun / rewarding

**“I don’t really find walking a particularly rewarding form of exercise.”**  
Male, C2DE, Family

**“I’d walk more if I could listen to my MP3, but at the moment my headphones are broken.”**  
- Female, ABC1, Pre-family

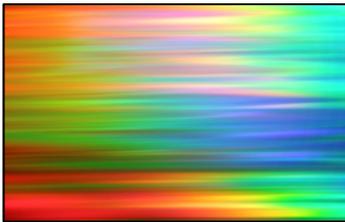
**“It’s just boring – and I always dread the walk back.”**  
- Male, C2DE, Pre-Family

**“People don’t engage with others in the local community any more, so walking is less enjoyable.”**  
- Male, C2DE, Family

**What can we learn from a wider exploration?**

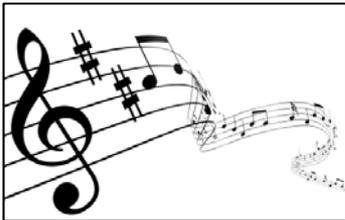
# Imagery associations : Walking

## Colours



- **Green/bright green – countryside, environment**
- Grey (winter), Red (summer) – the landscape
- Brown – for boring and repetitious

## Music



- **Classical, instrumental – slow and relaxing**
- Techno/upbeat – happy
- Folk – good for environment
- Soulful blues – slow but enjoyable
- Country & Western – boring and repetitive

## Emotions & feelings



- **Happy and content, good mood**
- Calm, peaceful, unrushed
- Assertive, confident, busy
- Having fun
- Depressed, bored, frustrated

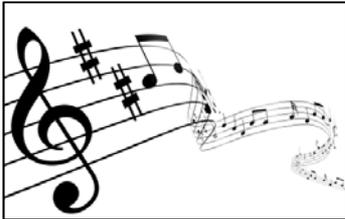
# Imagery associations : Driving

## Colours



- **Red for aggression, speed, bad for environment, stress**
- Blue/red/purple – pleasure, passion, freedom
- Black – essential, practical **or** lazy, annoyed, stuck in traffic
- Grey – new car interiors

## Music



- **Rock/thrash metal/loud – road rage, anger or passion**
- Electro/Dance – fast
- Funky – pleasurable
- R&B – freedom and fun

## Emotions & feelings



- **Angry, frowning, irritated, aggressive, stressed**
- Happy
- Relieved, independent and free, passion
- Comfort
- Bored

# Imagery associations : Cycling

## Colours



- **Green – environment, countryside, exercise**
- Brown – mud
- Black – hard work, dangerous
- Grey – boring
- Blue/yellow - freedom

## Music



- **Rock – fast and dangerous**
- Classical – relaxing
- Soul – good for environment
- Jazzy/upbeat – fun
- Clockwork/depressing – boring and repetitious

## Emotions & feelings



- **Happy, relaxed**
- Freedom
- Peacefulness
- Competitiveness/showing off
- Determination, stamina
- Frustration, unhappiness

# Does walking even have an image?

After deeper delving there is a myriad of positive association with walking even from 'non walkers':

- Green and pleasant, rural *not urban*
- Relaxing and calming
- Uplifting, happy, confident
- Unrushed



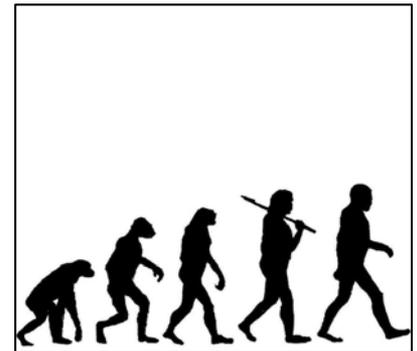
Driving on the other hand represents something more frenetic:

- Aggressive, angry
- Stressful
- Fast and loud
- Not environmentally friendly

The issue is not one of a negative perception but more that walking is not often considered as a viable alternative to motorised transport, the imagery of walking again represents an ideal not a reality

# What can we learn from history and culture?

- Walking is our natural mode of transport and signifies the evolution of man
- With the advent of technology came the denigration of walking as a mode of transport
- Technology has allowed us to *choose* whether we walk or not and the pace of modern society has meant we often choose *not* to
- In developed nations the motor car is still the symbol of affluence and independence whilst in some cultures walking can represent poverty and purposelessness
- Historically and culturally walking has represented or signified a quest for enlightenment or change, in modern times it is often used to 'make a point' eg. charity walk or political march
- Urban planning can in turn encourage and support walking eg. Amsterdam and Manhattan or repel and dissuade it eg. LA and even London



**Summing up and taking it forward**

# Summary (1)

- Most Londoners lead extremely **busy lives** and are having to make many different short and longer utility journeys
- By their very nature 'utility' journeys have a **purpose** and there are often **other factors at play** such as time constraints and multiple destinations
- Modal choices are a combination of **convenience** and **pragmatism**
- Therefore there is no overt rejection of walking – for many of these people it simply doesn't enter the **consideration set**
- The irony is that unlike something like cycling, **everyone walks** even if it is only to get to a 'proper' mode of transport. This could be why it is the ***invisible mode***



## Summary (2)

- **Walking *per se*** is seen as a **good thing** by all – it evokes images of scenic calm, reflection and care for the environment



### However

- There is a **disconnect** between this ideal and the pull factors surrounding most utility journeys and indeed the pace of modern life
- Currently it suits 'non walkers' to surround themselves with **multiple barriers** as it would simply be too much of an upheaval to their lifestyles to allow walking in
- The truth may be that until it is seen as **more convenient** than other modes then they may never walk for utility purposes



### Although to be fair

- The **rational barriers** cannot be disputed, there are times when it is simply preferable to use a car or other motorised transport
  - Speed
  - Conveyance of belongings/people
  - Multiple short journeys
  - Unsavory surroundings
  - The elements!



**Some thought starters**

# Springboards for debate and creative territories

## 1. Positioning or repositioning



- **Don't** position walking as an alternative to other modes – it will rarely address enough practical needs or win against the car
- **Do** position it as having **higher order benefits**:
  - Creating precious 'me-time', a breathing space and chance to think
  - Not about physical fitness but more about a **commitment to well being**: incremental/incidental exercise plus none of the mental stress of other modes.
  - The 'flaneur' mentality – a **chance to reconnect** with your surroundings and experience and explore your city

# Springboards for debate and creative territories

## 2. Create some energy around it



- Make walking seem like a **mass movement**
- As with cycling the more **acceptable** and **commonplace** it becomes the more people will join in – it will take some early adopters to get the ball rolling

## 3. Harness other social trends

- The **antidote** to the pace of modern life
  - The return to community
  - Downshifting/downsizing
  - The slow food movement
  - As fashionable as yoga and Pilates



# Springboards for debate and creative solutions

## 4. How can urban planning help?



- More **pedestrianised** areas
- Better street **lighting**
- **Aesthetics** – lights in trees, clean walls and litter-free pavements
- Green **spaces**, more trees
- A haven away from traffic
- The **Millennium Bridge** provides a perfect example of how urban planning can shift or encourage behaviour:
  - Is only for pedestrians
  - Highly rewarding vistas
  - Connects two major and much loved attractions
  - Demonstrates that you can move from north to south London on foot



**Walking**